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SOME FEATURES OF THE CONTRARY TO FACT CONSTRUCTION.

BY J. B. GREENOUGH.

THE construction of 'the condition contrary to fact' with its conclusion has a peculiar interest from the fact that its fundamental idea lies very deep in the natural forms of human thought. So the development of the construction has been essentially the same in many different languages. The genesis of the construction is generally understood and needs no discussion, but in order to make clear some particular features which I wish to discuss it seems necessary to give a *résumé* of the method of development by which this construction has come into being. It comes of course from the transfer to past time of the ideal (future, less vivid) condition. Most languages have some means of representing an ideal condition in the future with its natural conclusion. Then by the natural shunting processes belonging to the given language, this future condition comes to be transferred to the past. The prospective condition is referred back from the *present* future, to the *past* future. When the condition is thus thrown back, usually by a change of tense, the implication almost necessarily arises that the condition has not in the particular case happened to come true and so is not at present the actual state of things; in other words, is unreal or contrary to the fact. For ordinarily in the opposite case, *i.e.* if it has come true, there is no need of a condition at all. Hence in very many languages a past tense (with a modal sense, of course) which looks toward the future has come to have this contrary to fact implication. This tendency is strikingly shown by the accompanying use of adverbs. *Then* (or its equivalent) continues or emphasizes the unreal supposition, while *now* is used to refer to the real state of things as contrasted with the supposition. To give an example, *si habeam dem*, *if I should have* (by and by) *I would give*, becomes, when referred to

past time by change of tense, **si haberem darem**. This should properly mean, *if I was (yesterday) going to have, I was (yesterday) going to give*. But the future time supposed in the expression is, rather loosely perhaps, assumed to coincide with the actual present. So the fact that the idea remains a conditional one shows that it is not now true. Hence the expression comes to mean, *if I had (now) (which I have not), I would give*. With the use of adverbs we have **si haberem, tum darem, at nunc, etc.**, *if I had, then I should give, but now (as it is), etc.* Sometimes, however, the future of the past is supposed to fall short of the present moment and the implication is that the supposition is contrary to past fact (though still future to the past of the supposition). The meaning then is, *if I had had, I should have given*. It is from this variation that there comes in Latin for instance a wavering of the imperfect subjunctive in this construction between present and past time. The genesis of the regular contrary to fact construction in past time is the same. One can say, **si habuerim dederim**, because many languages like to represent a future action as completed. When this is thrown back, becoming **si habuissem dedissem**, the represented completion of the action makes the moment of the condition regularly fall short of the present moment, and we have a contrary to fact construction in past time.

Though the usual means by which the change to past time is effected is a change of tense, yet other devices are sometimes used to accomplish the same purpose. An interesting example of such an effect is found in *Aen.* i. 58. Here Virgil is describing the functions of Aeolus and wishes to indicate the result of the god's neglect in case he should happen to omit these functions. The story is in the main conceived in the past, though the historical present is used in this particular passage. The natural way to express the idea would be **ni fecisset** or at least **ni faceret**, either of which constructions would imply the unreality of the condition which is in the poet's mind. But instead of using either of these he jumps back without change of tense, and by a kind of *repraesentatio* puts himself at the imagined moment. He simply says **ni faciat**, *if he should not do so*, giving the condition as it would appear at the past time referred to. The description may also be a present condition of things. If so, this case would be undistinguishable from the next.

Not very different from this is the regular archaic construction in which the present subjunctive is used instead of the imperfect where the condition is obviously unreal in present time, as in *si hic sis aliter sentias*. But here the writer instead of going back to past time in a manner brings the past time up to himself and makes the time of the condition present. An instructive example of this is in Plaut. *Miles* 764, *otium si sit possum expromere*, *if there were time for it I could set forth*. Here the use of the present *possum* (see below p. 15) shows clearly that we have to do not with a survival of the contrary to fact idea in the old optative, *sit*, but with a future condition not 'shunted' as is usually the case. We may compare Cic. *Cat. Mai.* xvi. 55, *possum persequi multa oblectamenta rerum rusticarum*, *I could, etc.*

Another step in the process of development of this curious construction appears in the substitution in the apodosis of a future condition of any verb or phrase which (as in the last two examples above) has a future outlook of its own and so does not need any modal or temporal indication of futurity. From this substitution we get various forms of present tenses in the conclusion, such as those of verbs of *necessity*, *propriety*, and *possibility*, e.g. *possum si velim*, *I can if I will*; *alius finis constituendus est*, *si . . . prius . . . dixero*. Even a past tense rhetorically conceived may be used in the same manner, e.g. *si eundem (animum) habueritis, vicimus*. We may compare *si non alium iactaret odorem, laurus erat* (*Georg.* ii. 133); so, *pons sublicius iter paene hostibus dedit, ni unus vir fuisset*, Liv. ii. 10. (For explanation of tense see below.)

Now, in these cases, when by the change of tense from present to past the point of view is changed to past time, as above set forth, there is naturally no subjunctive in the apodosis but a past indicative instead. The same implication of unreality, however, arises as in the other cases, and we have the contrary to fact construction with past tenses of the indicative. It is some features of this special case that I wish to discuss, but it is necessary to keep the whole genesis in mind in order to understand the relations.

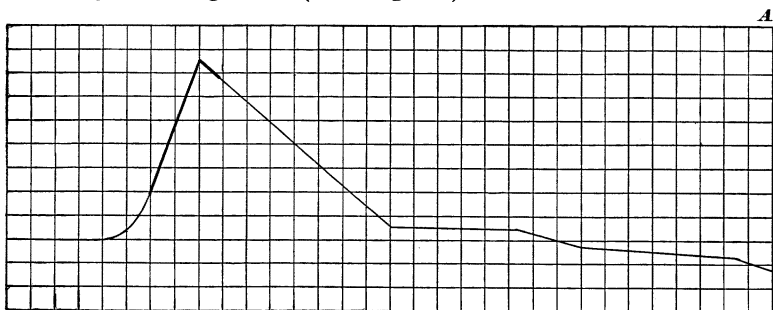
In the ordinary case of imperfect indicative contrary to fact where a protasis occurs and so the condition is stated, there is no difficulty. The analysis is simple. We may make, for example, an expression like: *Pompeius et si absit eligendus est*, *P. must be chosen, even if he*

should not be there (or, as we say, *is not there*). Throw this back, and it becomes, speaking loosely, *P. had got to be choosen* (erat), *even if he was not going to be there*. Usually this ultimately means: *We ought to choose him, even if he were not there* (which he now proves to be).

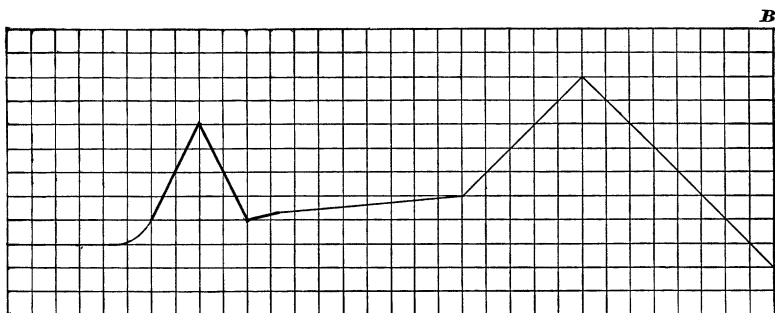
In a few cases this implication of unreality does not arise, but these will be discussed below. In a few other cases, which may be important as we proceed, there is a logical dislocation between condition and conclusion. Thus, *The man intended to make a will if he hadn't died*. Here there is no strict connection between his intention and the fact of his death, but we jump over the slight gap and treat the two as properly connected. All these are plain enough.

But the real difficulty comes in those cases of the contrary to fact construction in which there is no condition expressed and in which ordinarily none in fact can be exactly formulated. In these cases we have a form of words which is precisely the same, both in Greek and in Latin, with the form that has no idea of the contrary to fact. Occasionally the context will show which is the meaning, especially by fixing the time really referred to as present. Then the past tense is seen to be out of place, unless there is such an implication. But it is not necessarily so, and it seems absurd that Demosthenes or Cicero should have had no means of letting us know whether *ἐχρην γὰρ ἡμᾶς*, or *nam nos decebat* (equivalent expressions, see Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* i. 48, 115, translating Euripides) meant: *We ought to* (or *to have*), and did, or *we ought to* (or *to have*), and do not. If, as said above, the expressions are shown by the context to refer to present time, we see that they can only mean "but *do not*." Still in the absence of the context they may mean the other. That these orators did have a means of distinguishing the two I am satisfied. My attention was called to the possible difference one day when I changed my subject just before a lecture and announced to my class, "I *intended* to give you to-day the *cum* constructions." Of course they at once knew that I was not actually going to do so, and we soon discovered that the inflexion on *intended* was markedly different in this case from what it would have been if I had been going to do as I had intended. The emphasis (as the word is ordinarily used) was the same, but the tones through which the word ran were not at all the same. Afterwards, with the

assistance of a friend having a better ear than I, I secured a graphic representation on coördinate paper of the rise and fall of the tones, wherein each line represents half a tone. This scheme for the two meanings is here given. (See diagram.)



I meant to go to town to-day (and went, or am going).



I meant to go to town to-day (but have not gone, or am not going).

NOTE. The heavy lines represent the tone of the emphatic word.

We have very little information as to the tone-inflexions of Greek or Latin speech, but we may be sure that they were not less in extent and variety than those of our own. Without concluding at all that the difference between the two forms of speech was the same in those languages as in our own, it seems to me almost certain that they were similar and served precisely the same purpose. So we may well write in our grammars, under the two statements of the meaning of

ἐχρην and the like, "no doubt with a different voice-inflexion, which distinguished the two to the ear though not to the eye."

A corollary which seems to follow from this is not so certain, but at least deserves consideration. The question has often been mooted whether in the cases of this construction where no condition was expressed, any was implied. The question has latterly been decided in the negative, and the grammars in general state that view. But it may not be so sure as it has been regarded. If there was a difference in inflexion in the two cases above mentioned, we can hardly suppose it to have been without logical significance. Inflexions never are. What then could be the logical difference between these two inflexions? It certainly could not lie in the words themselves, and therefore would seem to imply something to be supplied. To see what that implication is we must, remembering the genesis of the construction, look at the corresponding forms in the present tense. Let us suppose then that one starting from his house in the morning says, "I *intend* to come home to lunch," he may say it with no suggestion of an ellipsis, but if he uses the inflexion marked A above any one would be conscious of an ellipsis. I think I am not mistaken in supposing that this ellipsis is of some hindering condition either precisely defined or more commonly vaguely conceived. Such an ellipsis would be: "unless Brown invites me to the club," or, "if nothing happens." Another example more nearly approaching the kind of phrases in question is this: If one had asked a lawyer as to the income tax, he might say, "Well, the *law is* that you shall file an inventory," etc., using the same inflexion A spoken of above. In such a case there is obviously an ellipsis of a condition like: 'If you want to follow that,' or, 'If that makes any difference.' In each of these cases there is to my mind an evident ellipsis indicated by the inflexion and the slight pause after the significant word or phrase. But each of these expressions thrown back into past time by change of tense with the same inflexion gives precisely the logical force of the necessity, propriety, and possibility contrary to fact construction: "I *intended* to come to lunch (but I did n't)," "The *law was* to do so and so (but you have n't done it)." It seems inconceivable that if the condition exists, though not definitely formulated, in the present use, it should vanish entirely when the tense is changed, and the contrary to fact implication arises.

This condition, though extremely vague and often defying formulation, must therefore be essentially implied in the past tense as well as in the present, and these expressions really depend for their well-known logical force precisely on this ellipsis as indicated by the peculiar inflexion and pause.

I said above that in the transfers of the future condition to past time the implication of unreality almost necessarily arises. That it does not always arise, I think, will appear from a few unmistakable examples. The most striking one is in Hor. *Sat.* i. 3. 4 ff.

Caesar qui cogere posset
Si peteret per amicitiam patris atque suam non
Quicquam proficeret; si collibuisset ab ovo
Usque ad mala citaret, etc.

In this case any idea of the condition being contrary to fact seems to be excluded by the alternative form of the two conditions. One might be contrary to fact, but hardly both. In fact, to add "which he did not" makes nonsense of the whole. They must be future conditions, as we can see by changing the time of the whole statement. If Horace were describing a man then living he would say **C. qui possit, si petat . . . proficiat, [at] si collibuerit . . . citet.** Here we should have a general future supposition: *He is a man whom if Caesar should beg, etc., it would be useless; but if he should take a fancy, he would shout, etc.* The only difference between this and Horace's real words is that the man is now dead, and his character is described as a thing of the past. To produce this effect the tenses are changed to past; but it seems certain that no implication of unreality has arisen, because you cannot add 'as he did not' or its equivalent in any form whatever. Another example where the indefinite relative takes the place of the conditional particle, as often, is in Cic. *ad Fam.* 7. 1, **reliquas vero partes diei tu consumebas eis delectationibus quas tibi ipse ad arbitrium comparabas, nobis autem erant ea perpetienda quae Sp. Maecius probavisset,** *whereas I had to put up with whatever had been approved by Sp. Maecius.* If Cicero had been speaking before the games, he would have said **perpetienda sunt quae . . . probaverit,** *must put up with whatever Sp. M. shall (have) approved,* and we should have had the ordinary future condition.

But he speaks of the games as now over, and so puts the same words into past time. There is, however, no implication of the contrary to fact idea, nor can there be. Somewhat less clear, but, I think, essentially of the same kind, is an example in *Caes. B. G.* iii. 44: *Pompeius neque a mari . . . discedere volebat, quod omnem apparatus belli . . . ibi collocaverat, frumentumque exercitui . . . subportabat, neque munitiones Caesaris prohibere poterat nisi proelio decertare vellet, quod eo tempore statuerat non esse faciendum.* Here, though there is a statement of the contrary of the supposition at the end, yet the balance of the clauses *volebat*, *poterat*, and the whole tenor of the statement show that an actual situation is described (*did not wish, was not able*), and that the last clause, beginning with *quod*, is an afterthought. A statement of a present situation would be *neque volt . . . neque potest nisi velit*. This situation is merely thrown back into past time; and though a contrary to fact idea is possible, yet it seems less natural, all things considered, than the simple future condition like the other cases. Another case is found in *Liv. xxii. 24*: *tumulus apparuit ad quem capiendum si luce palam iretur hostis . . . praeventurus erat, if they should go openly by daylight, the enemy would anticipate them.* This has an appearance of indirect discourse; but if the whole is changed to present time, as in the last case, the semblance of indirect discourse at once vanishes.

With these passages may be compared one in *Verr. Act. Sec. v. 168*: *adservasses hominem . . . clausum habuisses dum Panhormo Raecius veniret. Cognosceret hominem aliquid de summo supplicio remitteres. Si ignoraret tum . . . hoc in omnis constitueres.* Here, however, the whole passage is clearly colored by the contrary to fact suggestion in *adservasses*, so that *cognosceret* and *ignoraret* may be regarded as partaking of the general unreal character of the whole situation. Still they present a good example of the relation between the future protasis and its representative in past time.

It thus appears that the implication of unreality is not in all cases a necessary one. Whether, however, any particular class of conditions — and, if so, what class — excludes the implication, I have not been able to determine.